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ABSTRACT

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates transition services to prepare students with disabilities to live and work in the community as adults; the School-to-Work (STW) Opportunities Act requires that all students, including those with disabilities, have access to all STW activities. This paper overviews collaborative efforts in New York and New Jersey to meet these two legislative mandates. In New York, state agencies work closely together on all initiatives. Transition coordination sites established to assist school districts with IDEA requirements now provide technical assistance to local STW partnerships to ensure inclusion of students with disabilities in STW activities. The New Jersey Partnership for Transition from School to Adult Life project aims to establish a statewide coordinated system of programs and services that facilitate the transition of students with disabilities to adult life. Activities are outlined for each of the project's five objectives: reviewing and revising state policies related to transition in the areas of STW initiative, workforce development, education, and vocational rehabilitation; supporting county-based consortia to coordinate and expand transition services; developing self-determination training and related activities for parents, students, and professionals; increasing parent and family access to transition information; and providing training, technical assistance, and information to stakeholders to increase knowledge of best practices. Training materials and publications are listed. Contact information is included for agency and STW personnel in New York and New Jersey. (SV)

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School to-Work Transition: Developing Collaborative Partnerships for the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities at the State, County and Local Level

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Background

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that all students age 14 and older, classified as having a disability must be provided transition programs and services that will prepare them to live, learn and work in the community as adults. IDEA also states that such programs and services should, to the extent possible, be provided to disabled students with their non-disabled peers. The School-to-Work Opportunities Act (SWOA) states that all students, including those with disabilities should have access to all school-to-work (STW) activities. SWOA and IDEA both stress the need to enable students to reach higher standards and increase their skills.

New York and New Jersey have both addressed these mandates by developing collaborative partnerships for the inclusion of students with disabilities at the state, county and local level. Following are overviews of the partnerships that they have formed.

New York State Partnerships

New York State supports the intent of these two laws and the State Education Department has worked very diligently to ensure that all truly means all in the three areas of STW: school-based, work-based, and connecting activities. At the State level, the Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID), represents disability-related issues on the School-to-Work State Advisory Council. Liaisons from the Offices of Workforce Preparation and Continuing Education and VESID work closely together on all initiatives.

NYS received a five-year transition systems change grant which funded eight regional Transition Coordination Sites to assist school districts with the implementation of transition requirements. This included assistance in areas such as community-based assessment and instruction, person centered planning, staff training, mentors, interagency cooperation, and the development of transition plans (career plans). The information, experience, and contacts derived by the site staff from participation in this process were accessed when NYS received the five-year school-to-work systems grant. The sites were funded with STW monies to provide technical assistance to local STW partnerships for the purpose of ensuring the inclusion of students with disabilities and transition programs and services in the broader area of STW, and to share information, expertise and contacts learned through transition activities. The sites have been providing technical assistance to STW partnerships for two years and will continue through this school year.

To ensure a cooperative effort occurred between the STW partnerships and the sites, the two offices sent a joint memorandum to all the local partnership coordinators requesting that they work cooperatively with the site staff. The sites contacted the partnerships with an offer of technical assistance (here's how we can help you) rather than reminding them that all students must participate. This approach in addition to their experience produced positive teams.

The site coordinators provide technical assistance to local partnerships, individual schools, and any of the participating members of the partnerships in their region. NY has many partnerships in rural areas and has addressed specific issues such as identifying employers who will provide work experience, collaboration among a variety of agencies to jointly provide activities by pooling funds, transportation of students, and staff training. A list of specific types of assistance is attached.

A sample Post-School Indicators Survey has been conducted for the past two years of students in general and special education who have exited school the previous year. The results show that students in all areas of the state, whether in general education or special education, have a better chance of going on to a post-secondary program or being employed in a full-time job if they had occupational education and work experience while in high school. Based on this information and the favorable responses received by the site coordinators, VESID will continue to work closely with the Office of Workforce Preparation and Continuing Education.

New York has a very large geographic area, a very diverse population, and a large number of students in special education. These factors make it very difficult to provide school-to-work for all students. The issue of sufficient funding and support to sustain school-to-work systems change, especially in rural areas where resources are limited, must continue to be addressed.

New Jersey Partnerships

The New Jersey Partnership for Transition from School to Adult Life project is directed by the Office of Special Education Programs, in collaboration with the Office of School-to-Career and College Initiatives, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the University Affiliated Program of New Jersey and the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network, Inc. In order to assist students with disabilities in preparation for transition from school to careers, further education or training opportunities, and to independent living, the *New Jersey Partnership for Transition* maintains its purpose to create effective state and local mechanisms for providing transition services that students can access so that they can become contributing members of their communities. This is being accomplished through state interagency collaboration and funding the establishment of

county-based consortia involving local stakeholders. Technical assistance and training are provided through a variety of approaches: statewide activities, customized training and technical assistance to the county consortia members based on needs assessments, and district and student-centered activities.

Project Mission Statement: To establish a statewide coordinated system of programs and services that facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to adult life so they are prepared for and connected to opportunities and supports for full participation as valued and contributing members of the community.

Objective 1: Review and revise state policies related to transition for youth with disabilities in the areas of: School-to-Work Initiative; Workforce Development; Education; and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

- An interagency agreement was developed to outline common objectives regarding transition for seven state agencies working in collaboration. An agreement was signed in May of 1995. The State Interagency Work Group is presently in the process of revising and expanding a new interagency agreement. It is anticipated that a new agreement will be signed during Year 5 of the grant (the 1997-98 fiscal year).

- Establish and maintain a workgroup of state agency directors from Office of Special Education Programs, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and Office of School-to-Work Initiatives to review and develop policies regarding transition.

- Provide input into the School-to-Work (STW) RFP and cross reference transition RFP to promote collaboration at a local level among the Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs), STW local partnerships, transition county consortia and DVRS local offices.

- The STW local partnerships and transition county consortia are collaborating to ensure that students with disabilities are part of the STW system. Cross-training has been held and will continue to be offered among STW and transition stakeholders. Transition project staff have been involved in reading, scoring grant applications, monitoring local STW partnerships and joint Project Director meetings have been held.

- As a result of the Directors' Forum in January 1997, a critical policy recommendation was highlighted. The Unified State Plan for New Jersey's Workforce Readiness System, published in August 1996, includes a recommendation from the State Employment and Training Commission that: *The Transition County Consortium, established by the Departments of Education and Labor, must actively participate with the Workforce Investment Board's (WIB's) School-to-Work Opportunities committee to strengthen the representation of students with disabilities. This will also help to integrate transition of students with disabilities into the broader workforce development policy of the WIBs. The liaison between the consortium and the WIB will be the local office manager of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.*

- A Q & A document was developed and disseminated to parents, educators, agency personnel and community-based organizations. This document serves as a valuable resource. This past year it was made available on the New Jersey Home Page.

- DVRS policy was changed to allow DVRS counselors to receive referrals within two years of graduation, if appropriate, and provide technical consultation to students, when they are more than two years away from graduation or not ready to file applications for services at the time. In response to the revision of rehabilitation regulations this past spring, DVRS will provide for the development of the IWRP (Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan) prior to graduation for each student determined to be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services or, if the agency is under an order of selection, for each student able to be served under this order. The IEP guidelines developed by the project address the relationship and the consideration of the IEP and IWRP.

- Cost sharing for transition services between LEAs and DVRS is being piloted in two counties. This has resulted in the establishment of ten positions for transition services. In addition, OSEP is funding DVRS $300,000 for the establishment of six additional counselor positions dedicated to LEAs in six counties.

Objective 2: Establish and support county-based consortia to coordinate and expand transition services throughout the state.

- Eighteen Transition County Consortia have been funded to develop and coordinate transition services at the county level. Beyond the first year of funding, the LEA has a three-year commitment to maintain the project. Regularly scheduled meetings of grant project directors were held for progress reporting, information

dissemination and problem solving. In addition, joint meetings of transition consortia and the local school-to-work partnerships are held to build cooperation and collaboration at the local level.

- The majority of the training and technical assistance offered through the project was dedicated to the local county transition consortia and the remaining non-funded counties. Project staff worked intensively in all 21 counties of the state. The major themes of the training and technical assistance were on transition planning and IEP development; self-determination training for professionals and students; community-based instruction; parent-professional collaboration; and service coordination and resource identification.

Objective 3: Develop and implement a cadre of activities around self-determination for transition from school to adult life for parents, students and professionals.

- Self-determination training sessions have been held for students and/or professionals throughout the state. Leadership training was provided to families and natural support networks for students with disabilities to ensure their participation in transition services.

- Through this grant, SPAN has taken the lead in the development of a Parent Resource Network. The goal of this network is to have parent trainers and advocates in each of the twenty-one counties in New Jersey. Twenty-five parent advocates have been identified (at least one from each of the counties in New Jersey). These parents have received intensive training through this project. They come together four times a year for training and team building activities. They are resource parents for other parents of students in transition in their county. These parents are encouraged to join their local county-based transition consortia and will be connected to the project through SPAN, Inc.

Objective 4: Increase parent and family access to information regarding transition regulations and best practices to empower them to effectively participate and assist their children in the transition to adult life.

- Contract with consultants to provide training and technical assistance at the state, county, LEA and school levels regarding regulations and best practices in transition and collaboration for parents, families and professionals (UAP/SPAN training and technical assistance). Cross training will be encouraged.

- An in-state system of training and technical assistance has allowed the project to support local interagency teams, consumers, school districts, employers and community service providers and members. All activities of this component are directed toward local capacity building with an emphasis on student and family empowerment.

Objective 5: Provide training, technical assistance and disseminate information to parents, professionals and other stakeholders to increase knowledge of best practices in transition.

- Technical assistance and training have been made available on demand throughout the state via the Transition County Consortia and the School-to-Work Local Partnerships. Topics for training and TA include: *Transition Training for Case Managers; Transition Service Delivery and Best Practice; Transition and the IEP; Leadership Training for Families in the Transition Process; Strategies for Vocational Assessment; Strategies for Developing Functional Curricula; Person-Centered Planning; Training for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors; Training for Teams of Vocational Education and Child Study Team Personnel*. In addition to the training topics that were provided, accompanying training materials are available for each topic. The following also relate to this activity:

  ⇒ A training package on Transition Guidelines will be developed and implemented during the 1997-98 grant year.

  ⇒ Model Demonstration of Students with Severe Disabilities in the School-to-Work System: This project provided technical assistance to support the successful participation of students with severe disabilities (e.g. students with deaf/blindness; students with severe physical disabilities who require the use of assistive technology) under the School-to-Work Guidelines. A video production and report with case study information including the nature of the IEP planning, school-based, work-based and connecting activities will be developed during Year 5 of the grant. Barriers, successful strategies and recommendations for the increased participation of students with severe disabilities in the School-to-Work System will also be included in the report.

  ⇒ Training for Students, Parents and Professionals Regarding Preparation for Post Secondary Education: It was determined through needs assessment information from the transition county consortia and from other parents and professionals in secondary and higher education that training needs to be offered to provide

students, parents and professionals strategies to conduct appropriate planning for transition to college. Training and technical assistance were developed and implemented to address these needs. Written guidelines were developed and distributed to all participants in training and technical assistance activities.

⇒ Intensive technical assistance was delivered in response to specific requests from individual parents and parent support groups across the state. This deliverable includes phone consultation, on-site technical assistance, attendance at parent meetings, school visits, and other presentations and training sessions.

⇒ The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services received customized training for their field staff on topics determined by counselors.

⇒ In order to promote the inclusion of students with disabilities in the school-to-work system, the New Jersey Partnership for Transition is contracting with The Arc of NJ to provide technical assistance services regarding this area of need. The types of strategies to be utilized include but are not limited to: self-determination training; investigating the use of Social Security's Impairment Related Work Expenses and Plans for Achieving Self-Support; functional vocational evaluation; assistive technology; curriculum modification; and supported employment, etc. The Arc will also assist the LEAs in developing the necessary support services and interagency linkages to support students with disabilities in the school-to-work system.

Products & Dissemination

Stakeholders knowledge of transition best practices and their ability to implement these best practices has been increased through training materials and publications. The following is a status of publications for Year 4:

- "*What is Transition From School to Adult Life?: A Resource Manual for Youth with Disabilities*", a third edition will be printed this year.

- Transition Guidelines for Professionals, Parents and State Agencies (to be completed Fall, 1998).

- The publication *"Why Not College? A Handbook for Individuals with Disabilities"* is on schedule to be printed this current year. The project has contracted with experts in the field of learning disabilities in order to edit the document and make it more user friendly for students with learning disabilities. This document has been used in conjunction with regional training for

professionals, parents and students. The project will continue to use this resource as part of the training curriculum.

- *"It's Your Life: Live it to the Max - A Self-Determination Manual for Students with Disabilities"* was developed during Years 2 and 3 of the grant and was printed and disseminated during Year 3. During Year 4, a second printing was completed. A third printing is anticipated in order to keep pace with the great demand for training on this topic.

- *"A Guide to Developing an Effective County Interagency Transition Consortium"* was developed and disseminated during Year 3. This publication was also utilized during Year 4 to assist the emerging county consortia.

- *"A Parent and Family Handbook on Transition"* will be printed and disseminated during Year 5.

- A video production, *Voices of Experience: School-to-Career Through College* has recently been developed for students by students. The theme of the video is self-determination.

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